I hope you each have a wonderful restful Independence day on Tuesday. That said, I want to talk about a different kind of freedom than what we know in the US Constitution as “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

The concept of freedom has taken on many different meanings, generally it means unattached or unfettered. At the beginning of this country, many Puritans reveled in a freedom from a pope and a king and the freedom to worship God in a covenantal relationship which made sense to them. This was so important that this set the groundwork for freedom of religion within our constitution, one of the primary tenets of our US governmental groundwork.

That concept of freedom has changed a lot, it now more means the freedom of the individual, to pursue what he or she wants or desires, as long as that is not prohibited by law. Many like to pretend that the country was founded by Christians; however, most of the founding fathers were Deists. Deists are very specific subset of Christians, not a group that you would normally think of as Christian— think of Thomas Jefferson cutting and pasting out verses in the Bible that he didn’t like. It is heavily edited version of the bible and does not grapple with some of the hard texts which the Bible intrinsically wrestles with, even within its own corpus. So, let’s put aside whatever Americans and Deists think of when they think of freedom, and talk about what freedom looks like with God, because after all we are a church.

And so what pops into my mind, at least this week, is the song “*Me and Bobby McGee*” by Janice Joplin, “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” Did you know that there is a website that lists what people think that phrase means? I like to think it means that one acts as one’s truest self when there is not personal gain involved.

Looking at the Epistle’s passage from Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul strikes a contrast between how living under the law (and here he means the law of Moses, i.e. in other words the ten commandments which then turn into the 640+ laws or ordinances of Leviticus) is then different than living under grace, hopefully a life that then shows your truest self. In words that would be familiar in his era, he speaks of slaves changing owners. From being slaves to sin, and now being enslaved to God. To continue in the path of sinning is a way that leads to death. However, once you are enslaved to God you are made holy, you are sanctified.

What, pray tell, is the benefit of being sanctified? In the simplest way, it means your relationship with God is good. However, just because your relationship with God is good, it does not at all mean your life is easy. We need only look at the story of the binding of Isaac from Genesis to know that. In Hebrew it’s called the Akidah.

It is a very tough story. Many, even very learned scholars, are dismissive of it because they don’t like it… usually the response is something like, “what kind of God would even pretend to ask for a child sacrifice?” And I could write a whole sermon on this one story, but it is worthwhile to know that the Hebrew in the story uses a word נַעַר for “lad, servant, young man” both for the young lads or men with the donkey as well as for Isaac. In other words, what I’m saying is Isaac could have been a teen. How does that change things? Another aspect of the story to ponder is that this story is often read at the Easter Vigil, how does the story change when we look at Abraham as faithful to God to do what is asked, to sacrifice his son? How do we view Abraham in light of God and Jesus? Also Abraham’s language reflects a heavy-heart. He answers his son in the same language as he answers God. Here I am, הִנֵּה. And the stories words are, “Isaacc, the one, the ONLY son.’

And after considering all of that, let’s remember that Abraham and Sarah were ancient when they had Isaac. Maybe just maybe, Abraham figured that he should do what was asked. He is free after all to do so or not. He recognizes that God was gracious and gave him a son.. and what a gift. Abraham was free to act. He had a relationship with God. And it’s *because* of that relationship with God that he has nothing left to lose, even his son. And when you have nothing left to lose, God provides.

In a related thought, it was Ignatius who said that the closer one gets to God the freer one gets. In this sense, it is the freedom to be your true self. One becomes freer to welcome others and welcome God into the mix. One becomes freer to read and listen and learn from the prophets. One becomes more free to look at the needs of another—-to welcome the stranger with cold water.

Life becomes less about balancing a score and more about being real, because the only thing one has to lose is your soul and if you give that God, you have … in a phrase… “nothing left to lose.” And, honestly, everything to gain.